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SUBJECT: CROATIAN GOVERNMENT: ITF DIRECTOR CIMPERSEK MUST GO

REF: LJUBLJANA 0749

Classified By: PolOff Darren Taylor for reasons 1.5 (b) and (d)

Summary

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11. (C) The Government of Croatia is frustrated with the leadership of the International Trust Fund and will block extension ITF director Jernej Cimpersek's mandate. GoC officials expressed their frustration with Cimpersek's lack of professionalism and his unwillingness to focus on all donor priorities which, they claim, has led to a "polarization" of the demining community in the Balkans. They acknowledged that Cimpersek has been difficult to work with, but rejected the allegation that their decision was based on personality conflict. The GoC asserted that their decision is firm; as an extension can be passed only by consensus of the managing board, it appears Cimpersek's days as Director are numbered. GoC officials said they would prepare a position paper for the ITF managing board and key donors outlining reasons for their position. End Summary.

GOC: "It's Time For A Change at the ITF"

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12. (C) On July 28, we met with senior GOC officials involved in the work of the International Trust Fund (ITF). Present were Minister of Labor and Social Welfare Davorko Vidovic, MFA Advisor for Demining Dijana Plestina, and Croatian Mine Action Center (CROMAC) Director Oto Jungwirth. Plestina -- who is PM Racan's wife -- described Croatia's building frustration with ITF Director Cimpersek. She said the ITF managing board reacted strongly to Croatia's announcement at the July 22 board meeting at which it blocked extension of Cimpersek's mandate, but insisted that Croatia's decision is firm. Labor Minister Vidovic said that the position Plestina presented was the view of the GoC, and that the decision to block Cimpersek's extension had been taken in advance of the July 22 meeting. The decision was final and would not be reversed under any circumstances, asserted Minister Vidovic.

13. (C) Vidovic said that there have been a series of incidents over the past year in which Cimpersek and his deputy Goran Gacnik had acted inappropriately, both in public and at regional fora on humanitarian demining. It seemed at times that their goal was to embarrass GOC officials present at the meetings or Croatia in general. He stated that while the GOC was not completely innocent of responsibility for the strained relationship, GOC officials were always willing to sit at the table to discuss ways to find solutions.

14. (C) Vidovic explained that as the third largest donor to the ITF behind the US and EU, the GoC recognizes its responsibility to support the ITF's role in the region. The ITF has contributed to important positive developments in demining in the region, but the current leadership of the ITF seems to have lost sight of the fact that it is the donors, not the ITF staff, which are most responsible for these successes. Vidovic said he had instructed key personnel to draft a position paper outlining the GOC's position concerning the ITF leadership, a copy of which will be provided to ITF managing board members and key donors. He had also alerted FM Picula about this issue to prepare him for possible engagement.

15. (C) Plestina and Jungwirth stated that most of their concerns centered on issues of professionalism, regional ethnic biases, and the polarization of the demining community in the region. They claimed they made repeated efforts to improve their working relationship with the ITF, but Cimpersek seemed to prefer to distance himself from Croatia and engage as little as possible on Croatian matters. When he did engage, it was often in a rude, uncooperative, or unprofessional manner. During bilateral meetings, the ITF director would launch into tirades about what the ITF was or was not willing to do in Croatia, and how Croats are his biggest problem in the region. Plestina claimed other representatives from regional mine action centers had lodged similar complaints.

USG Intervention Appreciated, But Unsuccessful

16. (C) Vidovic and Plestina expressed appreciation for USG efforts to improve the relationship with Cimpersek, especially PM Assistant Secretary Bloomfield's personal involvement during a GOC-sponsored conference on demining in Dubrovnik in October 2002. They noted that even in the presence of senior USG officials, the ITF director displayed unprofessional behavior and used unacceptable language at

times when contentious issues were discussed.

17. (C) Plestina claimed that although they had low expectations, the GoC had made efforts to improve the working relationship after the meeting in Dubrovnik, if for no other reason than they had been asked to do so by the USG. But Cimpersek showed signs that he was unwilling to take steps to improve the relationship. He did not attend meetings that were held in Croatia and refused to travel to Croatia for some time. He has been unwilling to meet with GOC leaders to discuss ways of improving cooperation or to solicit GOC views about developments at the ITF.

Comment

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18. (C) The GoC decision to block Cimpersek's extension does not come as a surprise; Plestina and CROMAC have complained to us many times in the past, and we have been present at meetings when Cimpersek has acted inappropriately. The presence of Labor Minister Vidovic at the July 28 meeting was clearly intended to ensure that we understood that the GoC decision is a formal cabinet position and not just a reflection of a personality conflict between the ITF director and the PM's wife. Vidovic has in the past told us that he does not want the disagreement over the leadership of the ITF to become an irritant, but wants to make sure we understand that the GoC position is final.

19. (C) We concur with the GoC that it is time for Cimpersek to go and suggest that the managing board should seek a new, more professional director who is committed to working closely with governments in the region and with the main donors, both in the field and in donor capitals.  
FRANK

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